



# EARLY LABOUR

## ADVICE FOR WOMEN IN EARLY LABOUR

Your doctor or midwife has examined you and decided that you are in the early stages of labour.

Sometimes this is called the latent phase of labour or you may have been told that your labour is not yet fully established. This is usually because your contractions are not yet strong or frequent enough to make the cervix (neck of the womb) open very far. The contractions that you feel during this time are making your cervix (the neck of the womb) thin out and ready to open further.

Research tells us that the best place to spend this phase of labour is at home.

At home, you have the freedom of your own surroundings. You can eat, sleep and move around at your own pace. Listen to your body and do what you instinctively feel is right for you. Remember that your experience is uniquely yours.

On the next page the stages of labour are explained with some helpful ideas on how to manage the different stages of your labour.

### When to return to hospital

- » If your waters break.
- » If you have vaginal bleeding that is not mixed with mucous.
  - Vaginal bleeding with lots of mucous is called a 'show' and is a sign that labour is progressing normally. You can also get a 'show' if you have had a vaginal examination during your admission.
- » If the contractions are regular, last more than 30 seconds and are closer than 5 minutes apart.
- » If you are frightened or unsure about what is happening.
- » If you need pain relief.
- » If you do not feel your baby moving.

It is not unusual for some women to have more than one admission before labour is fully established, especially if this is your first baby.

Please contact your hospital if you have any concerns or questions or you wish to return to hospital.

If you are a patient at the Women's phone (03) 8345 2000 for assistance.

*Please refer next page for the stages of labour chart*

STAGE/PHASE OF LABOUR	FEELINGS	HAPPENINGS	HELPFUL IDEAS
<p><b>1st stage: early phase (8–16hrs)</b></p> <p>Cervix 0–4cm dilated (open)</p> <p>Contractions are 5–20 mins apart, lasting 20–40 seconds</p>	<p>Excited, apprehensive</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Mucous tinged with blood</li> <li>» Backache</li> <li>» Lower abdominal pain (like period pain)</li> <li>» Sometimes diarrhoea</li> <li>» Sometimes waters break</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Keep eating and drinking (small amounts often)</li> <li>» Call the hospital</li> <li>» Time your contractions (from start of one to start of the next)</li> <li>» Move around, keep busy</li> <li>» Rest if you need to</li> <li>» Empty your bladder every two hours</li> </ul>
<p><b>1st stage: active phase (3–5hrs)</b></p> <p>Cervix 4–8cm dilated</p> <p>Contractions are 3–7 mins apart, lasting 50–60 seconds</p>	<p>Becoming weary, restless</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Contractions, strong and regular</li> <li>» Intense, lower abdominal pain</li> <li>» Backache may continue</li> <li>» Totally focused on labour</li> <li>» Dependent on support people</li> <li>» Blood tinged mucous</li> <li>» Waters may break</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Use deep breathing</li> <li>» Focus</li> <li>» Take a hot shower or use hot packs</li> <li>» Change positions</li> <li>» Rest between contractions</li> <li>» Sip fluids/suck sweets</li> </ul>
<p><b>1st stage: transition (1/2–2hrs)</b></p> <p>Cervix 8–10cm dilated</p> <p>Contractions 2–3 mins apart, lasting 60–80 seconds</p>	<p>Tired, irrational</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Long, strong contractions</li> <li>» May have double peaks</li> <li>» May feel anal pressure and urge to push</li> <li>» Intense tiredness</li> <li>» Maybe nausea and vomiting</li> <li>» Shaky</li> <li>» Feelings of panic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Try a position change</li> <li>» Massage your back and thighs</li> <li>» Place a cool flannel on your face and neck</li> <li>» Listen to people's reassurance</li> <li>» Believe in your body</li> </ul>
<p><b>2nd stage: pushing (1/2–2 hrs)</b></p> <p>Cervix fully dilated (10cm)</p> <p>Contractions 2–5 mins apart, lasting 60–90 seconds</p>	<p>Working hard</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Contractions space out</li> <li>» Pain is less intense, more pressure</li> <li>» Strong urge to push</li> <li>» Stretching, burning as baby's head moves down</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Push with contractions (use a mirror)</li> <li>» Rest between contractions</li> <li>» Cool flannel or spray to face and neck</li> <li>» Listen to support people – you may need to pant through the strong urge to push to slow down the birth of the baby's head</li> </ul>

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